

My teaching philosophy

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Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the Ministry of Education of the Kyrgyz Republic has included a few social science disciplines in the list of the Educational State Standards, though the content of these subjects and teaching methodologies are still weak. One of the problems, which I constantly face in Kyrgyzstan when developing a new course, is the terrible shortage of teaching/reading materials of non-soviet authors. A few books in Russian/Kyrgyz on Political Culture, for example, cannot give diversity of theories for analytical discussions and critical choice. Two year work of collecting study materials on the subject has given me today an opportunity to develop western type of courses on Political Culture, Sociology and Intercultural Communication, which I am currently offering to University students. Yet, no textbook in Kyrgyz language on Political Sciences is still being written/translated.

My teaching objectives

In my courses I generally pursue a goal to develop the skills for peaceful exchange of opinions and raise consciousness of the importance of the subject matter. Since my courses cover attitudes, values and behavior of people, it touches the fundamental issues of the society. The courses also deal with the issues of political, social and economic development.

In Kyrgyzstan, I have often been a witness of intolerance and quarrels at training workshops for differing opinions. Sometimes, clashes grow up to aggressive fighting in meetings. This pattern takes place not only in classrooms, but also in families, meetings, even at the Parliament. Therefore, I think that developing a non-violent way of participation in discussions and peaceful way of conducting constructive dialogue is utterly important in the XXI century.

However, beyond learning to participate and lead discussions, student should be able to present ideas and defend theories, persuade and accept, be tolerant, but active, as well as be able to apply the concepts and analyze the subject matter of the discipline. In other words, students need to respond questions posed for the learning stages in the Bloom's taxonomy.

Teachers know that a student passes different stages of growth in his/her worldview, and, every stage influences attitudes, value systems, behaviors, expectations about politics and society, i.e. political culture. In this growth s/he needs an experienced fellow traveler. In my case, I often lacked the one and my journey has been much longer than that of current students. When I was a sophomore during the Soviet Union, I believed that the ideology of the CPSU is perfect, the USSR is the best country in the world and its leaders are the most kind and caring. I could not even think to question about their moral legitimacy. Although, I had no interest in the writings of Lenin and Marx and had not read all of them, I believed in the truthfulness of them. I believed because I was taught so. The schools did not give me any other choices; it did not encourage any search for alternatives, because I was totally brainwashed. This belief continued until the collapse of the state. After the collapse, I started to seek for a truth in politics, freedom, god and other things. This search eventually brought me to graduate study in the USA, where I met so many different worlds and opinions, which broadened my understanding about the world. I learned different learning styles, consciousness raising

and teaching methods, participated in discussions, wrote tenth of papers and thesis. In my teachings I do not want for my students the repetition of the first part of my story.

I also believe that teachers must not only respect students' experience and knowledge, which they bring to the classroom, but also actively exploit them in the reflections and dialogues. Since the experiences are empirical and personal, they are effective basis for comparison, reflection, analysis, synthesis, and application. Therefore, I will encourage students to connect their life-stories with the subject matters and theories, both in oral presentations and writings.

My teaching methods

I believe that learning is a dynamic process and learning styles are diverse. Thus, teaching should also be. I also believe that active citizenship is better than passivity. Therefore, active learning styles should be encouraged. I prefer diversity to monotony. Thus, diversity should occupy the classroom.

I also believe that active or interactive methods are not something new for Central Asia. As well, lecturing or sermons have been an integral part of pedagogy/androgogy in the Central Asian history. Indeed, the modern paradigms: active learning, corporative, collaborative learning, critical approach to knowledge, etc... have been applied in Central Asia and Middle East from the ancient times. The great religious leaders as Jesus, Muhammad, and Buddha employed these methods as well. The Central Asian traditional learning model Master-Disciples included most of the "new" active methods.

Thus, one of the problems of teaching in Kyrgyzstan is not the ignorance of methods, but employment of those methods in classrooms in an effective way in the limited time-frame. It means the instructor must play not only "sage on the stage" role, but also be "a guide on the side". Active engagement with the material becomes part of experience and students will be able to use the experience in different contexts (Bruner, 1961). Indeed, in my experiences, I can't remember most of lectures and theories conveyed upon me by professors, but plainly recall the activities I did during my undergraduate studies. However, adopting active learning does not mean eliminating the lecture format (Bonwell and Eison, 1991).

I am a firm supporter of diversification of learning methods, it would be even more efficient to conduct teaching outside classrooms. For instance, in the case of social sciences, we could visit the Parliament, conduct the class next or inside the White House, visit other buildings of political institutions. I remember how my professor at the University of Massachusetts organized an excursion to an elementary school in Boston. There I clearly understood what an American school is! Some of my assumptions were shaken in two hours of active learning. Therefore, learning by doing and observing is an integral part of my teaching.

Besides class discussions, quizzes, one minute essays, small group discussion, debate, posing questions to the class, think-pair-share activities, and polling the class, it also would be a definite advantage for learners to conduct a research and writing a thesis to the end of the course. They would learn to concentrate on a problem and develop their own ideas of solving.

However, Taking into account the idea of “multiple intelligence” and different learning styles, I do not want to impose all the methods on all students. Most of my assignments will be elective, and some of them optional. For instance, students will be given a choice - either a final research paper, or a presentation of equal value and volume, or an examination.

Finally, I believe that every teacher should keep in mind that we are also learners, and as Paulo Freire pointed, “there is no teaching without learning”.

Literature

Bonwell, C. & Eison, J. (1991). *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom* AEHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No.1. Washington, D.C.: Jossey-Bass. [ISBN 1-87838-00-87](#).

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